



Southeast Fishery Bulletin

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Oculina Comment Periods Open

The Notice of Availability (NOA) and Proposed Rule (PR) for Snapper Grouper Amendment 13A to the Snapper-Grouper Fishery of the South Atlantic Region (13A) are available for comment. The South Atlantic Fishery Management Council (Council) has submitted 13A for review, approval and implementation by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA). The experimental closed area constitutes a portion of the Oculina Bank Habitat Area of Particular Concern, which is in the Exclusive Economic Zone in the Atlantic Ocean off Ft. Pierce, Florida.

Amendment 13A proposes to continue indefinitely the current prohibition on fishing for South Atlantic snapper-grouper in the experimental closed area and on retaining such species in or from the area. The Council would review the configuration and size of the experimental closed area within 3 years of the publication date of the final rule that would implement Amendment 13A, and would re-evaluate all measures applicable to the area after 10 years.

The Council believes these actions provide the most biological, social and economic benefits while allowing for adaptive management. The proposed regulations would continue to protect snapper-grouper populations,

Oculina coral and associated habitat. Such extension would also provide a hedge against the scientific uncertainty associated with the status of some snapper-grouper species and reduce the possibility that these populations may fall below sustainable levels.

The public is welcome to comment on the NOA or PR by January 5, 2004, or January 9, 2004, respectively. Copies of these documents may be obtained by contacting Julie Weeder at 727-570-5753, or email Julie.Weeder@noaa.gov. Please indicate whether an electronic or hard copy is desired) or by pasting the following Internet links into a Web browser:

For the NOA:

<http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/14mar20010800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2003/pdf/03-27686.pdf>

For the PR:

<http://a257.g.akamaitech.net/7/257/2422/14mar20010800/edocket.access.gpo.gov/2003/pdf/03-29444.pdf>

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